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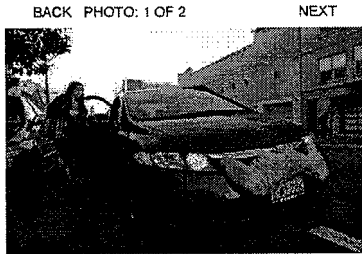
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**HOME/NEWS**

# Jacksonville City Council members want tougher penalties for Uber, Lyft drivers

City says internet-age car services operating illegally

By Nate Monroe Tue, Aug 5, 2014 @ 6:17 pm | updated Tue, Aug 5, 2014 @ 8:10 pm



AP  
 In this Jan 4, 2013 file photo, Lyft passenger Christine Shatzen gets into a car driven by Nancy Tchouu in San Francisco. Jacksonville City Council members want tougher penalties for Uber and Lyft drivers.

After months of criticism from local competitors, smartphone-era car services Uber and Lyft now face even more scrutiny as some Jacksonville City Council members explore tougher penalties to crack down on what they say are the companies' illegal operations.

Parking division chief Jack Shad, whose office regulates cars for hire, sent the companies

cease-and-desist letters late last month, saying city officials would consider levying penalties of up to \$500 for each violation if Uber and Lyft continue using unregulated vehicles to pick up passengers.

But council members Stephen Joost and Robin Lumb said they are concerned those penalties may not be enough.

They speculated that companies like Uber and Lyft will continue to operate illegally and pay fines on behalf of their drivers, simply calculating it as the cost of doing business. Unless the city can toughen its laws to make the cost of non-compliance impractical to sustain business — like giving the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office the power to impound unlicensed vehicles — the services will continue unabated.

"Without effective law enforcement, what we do isn't going to matter anyway," Joost said.

"We stand behind our driver partners 100 percent in any legal or financial cost associated with unjust citations," said Taylor Bennett, an Uber spokesman. "Any attempt to restrict what our driver partners are able to do ... only hurts the people that rely on Uber. It only hurts the city."

Lyft also pays fines for its drivers.

"We always stand behind the Lyft community and cover the costs of citations and as well as any necessary legal assistance," wrote Chelsea Wilson, Lyft's public policy communications manager, in an email to the Times-Union.

Uber began operating in Jacksonville last year, providing black sedans priced for middle- and upper-income travelers.



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Originally, when Uber representatives arranged last fall for changes in local laws to help the company compete, Jacksonville council members were assured the company would not locally use "uberX."

The company calls the service "the low-cost Uber," featuring cheaper, generally smaller rides that are often owned by the driver, who signs up online to work through the company.

Black sedans are often owned by some car services and used purely for driving customers, but uberX cars — the lower-case u is intentional — could be personal cars whose owners are trying to pay the bills.

City officials took note this summer that uberX is in service locally.

With the uberX service, riders can use a cellphone app from any location Uber services to summon a car that billed against a credit card already on file. Uber gets a cut of the fare for connecting the passenger and driver, but doesn't own any cars itself or keep drivers on its payroll.

Lyft, another new service in Jacksonville, operates in a similar fashion.

The companies say drivers must complete multi-step approvals, including background checks, and they tout \$1 million insurance policies. The companies emphasize that safety is a top priority. For example, Lyft says its safety standards — the battery of background checks, vehicle inspection, safety ride along and insurance coverage — exceeds the safety requirements for taxis and limos in Jacksonville.

But the city says the companies fall short in other ways.

Shad told both companies each driver who picks up passengers for any form of payment must have a valid for-hire driver's permit issued by the city, register the vehicle as an active vehicle-for-hire, allow the city to inspect the vehicle and bear a medallion issued by the city.

Critics, many of whom are local competitors, said their businesses are being hurt by Uber and Lyft not playing by the same rules, and on Tuesday several urged the city to move quickly to regulate the businesses.

"Cab drivers continue to starve," said Marcus Blount, CEO of Jacksonville-based Executive Cab. "These guys are being put out on the street."

It's not clear what tougher regulations would look like. Joost and Lumb want the Office of General Counsel to research the issue.

Bennett said Uber wants to work with local officials to write sensible regulations that account for new technology.

"The current regulations in place were written well before smartphones and mobile apps were fathomed," he said.

Nate Monroe: (904) 359-4289

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**RetChief**

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 @ 6:40 pm

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It would seem that less regulation would better level the playing field in favor of conveyors and passengers.

No longer require a valid for-hire driver's permit issued by the city, special registration as an active vehicle-for-hire, and a medallion.

Keep the safety inspection and require that cab companies, Uber, Lyft, or anyone else coordinating rides provide a list and pay sales tax.



**ALL-ACCESS MEMBER**

Why should we require cab companies to pay special registration and medallion fees? What good do those fees do for people who need a ride or for cab drivers?



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### HAPPY JACK

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 @ 6:40 pm

Sounds like Uber and Lyft forgot to grease the political skids before starting business. Maybe a steak dinner.



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### curiousjustice

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 @ 7:38 pm

Government sounds more and more like the mafia protection schemes you see in the movies. They want a piece of everything or they will rub you out.



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### traincompbox

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 @ 7:42 pm

@RetChief,  
Those fees you refer to are a source of revenue for the city and no more. At this point, if the city were to rescind them, do you really believe the cab companies would reduce their rates?

Personally, if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck and cr@ps like a duck... Vehicles for hire should all be treated the same.

Just because your business model uses smartphones instead of radios and meters doesn't change the bottom line of getting people from point A to B.



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### Noillusions

Tuesday, August 5, 2014 @ 9:36 pm

With a BILLION \$ Pension puzzle needing a cure, a stale economic landscape, over 12,000 vacated homes in jax, Bond Ratings slipping quarterly, a dismal Corporate influx, no major manufacturing coming in, a dead downtown, higher taxes looming, crime rampant, a barely adequate educational standard, a debt burden rising daily...and the administration asking to BORROW 100's of MILLION'S for yet more silly dt projects, political corruption robbing the Taxpayer and numerous town investments being and / or becoming Taxpayer Blackholes.

It's evident about the ONLY thing the Town Clowns are REMOTELY capable of addressing is Uber issues.

Uber has become a Global problem recognized by most of the planet's population. NOT!

Where do these Idiots come from?



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### jchap

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 2:10 am

So with the TERRIBLE public transportation system this city has it is actively doing even more to stop people from commuting? Cease and desist until we get our cut? Genius. This city continually holds itself back, not just in transportation but on most fronts.



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### Snakepilot

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 5:54 am

Ditto RetChief and Noillusions

Why is any city in the business of cab regulation ? What's wrong with jitney cab and bus services ?



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### ConnecticutYankee

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 6:37 am

Every city that these guys go into goes into battle with them making the same claims that they're dangerous, they cheat the taxi services, etc, etc, etc.



Our government: serving people since the 1700's... trying to do it exactly the same way as then. Here's my prediction. There will be a whole lot more bluster. A couple of million in legal fees spent. Then the likes of Uber will go on its way delivering the services people need and want. Carry on.



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### Bubba

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 7:11 am

Tougher PENALTIES? How is the Illegal Unauthorized Purchase 2014-412 Active legislation on the two water taxis by the Executive Branch ( Mayor) Defrauding and circumventing the Legislative Branch ( Jacksonville City Council) coming along?



Let's get ready to ride the RIO St. Johns as we transport you from one illegal side of the River to the other illegal side of the River.

Anyone reaching out to the Baltimore guys after the city kicked their butt to the curb?

2014-459 All the city contracts were allowed to expire. So who do you hire? We are now good till after the March elections.

Yesterday in committee active legislation 2015-305 New docking Rules and PENALTIES was deferred. There will be a noticed Public meeting and open to the Public TBA.

The PUBLIC TRUST needs to be restored in this community for everyone.

We want to say VISIT JACKSONVILLE!

Not

ÜBER YOU!



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### DocHoliday995

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 8:56 am

More republicans who only give lip service to free market capitalism, then turn around and protect the cronies and their crappy, disgusting cabs.



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### DonGene

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 9:32 am

I suppose the money didn't get to the right pockets? Maybe? Other cities are living with this and they love it. Why is Jacksonville against it? Money talks, simple and to the point, as usual in this city Money gets what it wants. Our politicians are too easily swayed by money! What happened to those that serve for the people and not big money, powerful men that have a direct line to the leaders of our city? Only thing that has changed since 1969 and consolidation? The party in power, those that control the purse strings. Business as usual if you ask me. If I had known consolidation wouldn't change anything I would have voted against it!!!



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### Steve D

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 12:03 pm

Follow the money. Whoever is paying for the hugely corrupt taxi "medallion system" (and thus using government to kill it's competition) is guaranteed to be giving big donations to the "vocal" city council members. And they damn sure don't want to lose the dollars from either "revenue stream" Pieces of corrupt crap! This is whey my brain explodes when leftists call this a "failure" of capitalism. This is cronyism plain and simple.



MORE

### Steve D

Wednesday, August 6, 2014 @ 12:15 pm

@DocHoliday995. Seriously? You seriously think this is a republican phenomenon. The service started in the biggest and

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most liberal cities in the world. Go look up "taxi strike over uber in London" and then tell me what republicans are involved in that idiocy.



ALL-ACCESS  
MEMBER

This is a function of cronyism and the left is as well versed on that subject as anyone. They're just better at pretending that the "care" more and with the cover they get from the state run media thy continue to fool folks like you. There are NO angles in Either party where cronyism is concerned.

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